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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES

Letter dated 14 April 1997 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights

I am writing to you concerning the address of the representative of Bulgaria at the session of the Commission held on 9 April 1997, under agenda item 10, "Violation of human rights in any part of the world".

The positions given in the above address concerning the status of the Bulgarian national minority in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia are a flagrant example of distorted facts and false and uncorroborated allegations. Bulgaria is trying to teach lessons on what the rights of minorities are about, while failing to recognize the very existence of minorities on its own territory - some 3 million people, including the Serb minority, whose members are entirely stripped of their rights and virtually assimilated.

In this connection, it is particularly indicative that all relevant political forces in Bulgaria oppose Bulgaria's signing the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities, which is in contravention of the obligation of Bulgaria as a European State. The fact that Bulgarian politicians have never reacted with regard to the ethnic cleansing conducted in this country against the hundreds of thousands of ethnic Turks shows that Bulgaria is not concerned with minority rights but, indeed, guided by sheer political interests. How could one otherwise explain the fact that the minority rights of over 800,000 Turks residing in Bulgaria are being totally ignored?

It is most unprincipled and inadmissible to teach lessons to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, a country which has always given much attention to national minorities' rights, including the Bulgarian minority, regardless of its minor numbers vis-à-vis the total population of the country and regardless of the Bulgarian representatives' addresses similar to this one, i.e. more detrimental than beneficial?

As for the actual status of the Bulgarian minority in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (25,214 persons, or 0.3 per cent of the total population), I wish to point out some facts which definitely contradict the words of the Bulgarian representative.

As far as the education of the Bulgarian population is concerned, over 2,300 pupils attend elementary schools (in Dimitrovgrad, Bosilgrad, Babusnica and Klisura), with teaching conducted bilingually, with intensive, in-depth studies in the Bulgarian language and culture. In Dimitrovgrad alone, 1,056 ethnic Bulgarian pupils attend elementary school, with 93 per cent of the employees and the school principal being ethnic Bulgarians. The high school in the city is attended by 260 ethnic Bulgarian pupils, the principal and 90 per cent of the employees are ethnic Bulgarians.

Belgrade University has a Department for the Bulgarian language, headed by an ethnic Bulgarian professor.

The culture centres of Dimitrovgrad and Bosilgrad are promoting the national culture and traditions of the members of the Bulgarian minority in varied sections: national folklore, dances, music and poetry. The same is true for the two culture and arts ensembles, "Georgi Dimitrov" and "Mladost" (Bosilgrad). The Bulgarian language "Hristo Botev" amateur theatre has been active for 106 years. The Dimitrovgrad municipal library stores some 30,000, the Bosilgrad library some 14,000 volumes in Bulgarian.

The publishing activities in Bulgarian are carried out by the "Bratstvo" publishing house of Nis, founded in 1959, which issues the journal Bratstvo (Brotherhood), a magazine for literature, the arts, sciences and social issues, Most (The Bridge), and a children's magazine, Drugarce. The Serbia Television broadcasts a 15-minute daily programme (30 minutes on Sundays) in Bulgarian. Local radio stations broadcast programmes in Bulgarian.

All the above testifies to the fact that the accusations made by the Bulgarian representative are very arbitrary indeed; that they are totally ungrounded.

As for religious freedoms and rites, this area is regulated under an agreement between the Bulgarian and Serbian Orthodox Church Synods. At the same time, may we recall the well-known fact that the service in the Orthodox Church is performed in the Old Slav (old Russian) Church language, which makes the allegations that the members of the Bulgarian minority are deprived of the right to profess their faith in their mother tongue blatantly unfounded. Such allegations, complemented by the demands that the service be professed by priests from Bulgaria, are obviously targeted at completely different objectives. As for the allegation concerning the poor condition of historical monuments, we wish to reiterate that, in 1996 alone, the following facilities

were reconstructed: the St. Jovan Bogoslov monastery, the fourteenth-century Church in the village of Poganovo, the St. Dimitrije monastery (in Dimitrovgrad), and a church in the village of Radojme, with the reconstruction of the town church of Dimitrovgrad being conducted at present and the renovation of the Memorial Ossuary from the 1885 Serb-Bulgarian war being planned.

In conclusion, I should like to voice our expectations that, concerning the FRY, Bulgaria will discontinue its policies guided by historical illusions based on the San Stephano Peace Accords, which have already in the past been the source of frustrations and disasters for the Bulgarian people, and that it will demonstrate in practice its respect for the basic principles contained in the OSCE Final Document, the Paris Charter and the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr. Chairman, would you kindly circulate this letter as an official document of the fifty-third session, under agenda item 10.

(Signed): Miroslav MILOŠEVIĆ
Chargé d'affaires a.i.